

Message Text

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EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY VEST

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, CSCE, UR, EEC, TU
SUBJECT: SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN AFRICA

REF: STATE 89701

1. I APPRECIATED HAVING A FULL, CABLED ACCOUNT OF YOUR APRIL 5 DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR BORCH REGARDING U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS. WHILE I AGREE WITH THE OVERALL THRUST OF YOUR REMARKS, I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT ON SOVIET MOTIVATIONS IN AFRICA (PARAGRAPH THREE, REFTEL), AS PERCEIVED FROM MOSCOW.

2. AS I SEE IT, THE AGE OF BREZHNEV AND HIS SENIOR COLLEAGUES, AND THEIR CONTROL OVER THE STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF FOREIGN POLICY, DOES NOT FIGURE DIRECTLY IN THIS EQUATION. FRANKLY, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE VERY CAUTIOUS IN ASSUMING THAT BREZHNEV AND HIS CLOSE SUPPORTERS ARE MORE "DETENTE-MINDED" AND THEREFORE MORE RESPONSIBLE THAN OTHER FACTIONS OR INTEREST GROUPS NEAR THE TOP. I THINK IT MUCH CLOSER TO THE MARK TO ASSUME THAT BREZHNEV
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AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE BEEN IN FULL CONTROL OF THE LOWER ESCHELONS OF POWERS IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS WITH RESPECT TO AFRICA AND VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING ELSE. THE BASIC PROBLEM IS THAT ASPECTS OF SOVIET POLICY, WHICH SEEM HIGHLY CONTRADICTORY TO US, DO NOT APPEAR IN THE SAME LIGHT TO THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP.

3. IN PARTICULAR:

--THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AS A WHOLE (AND, FOR THAT MATTER, ANY LIKELY SUCCESSORS TO THE 70-YEAR-OLDS THAT PRESENTLY DOMINATE THE POLITBURO) SEES SOVIET SUPPORT OF "NATIONAL LIBERATION" AND "PROGRESSIVE" THIRD WORLD FORCES AS ON AN ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT PLANE FROM SOVIET POLICY TOWARD THE UNITED STATES;

--THIS HAS BEEN THE OFFICIAL SOVIET POSITION SINCE AT LEAST THE MID-1950'S; IT WAS NOT IN THEIR VIEW SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED BY THEIR SIGNING THE JOINT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES WITH US IN 1972; AND IT HAS SUBSEQUENTLY CHARACTERIZED THEIR ACTIONS IN ANGOLA AS WELL AS THEIR BEHAVIOR IN THE HORN;

--RATHER THAN SPEAKING OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY'S SHOWING "AN INCREASED INCLINATION TOWARDS FOREIGN ADVENTURES," I BELIEVE IT MORE ACCURATE TO SPEAK OF A CONTINUING SOVIET READINESS TO EXPLOIT THIRD WORLD DEVELOPMENTS, PLUS A GROWING MILITARY CAPABILITY--IN LEAGUE WITH CUBAN COMRADES--TO DO SO.

4. IN OTHER WORDS, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP DOES THINGS -- WHICH WE SOMETIMES CONSIDER TO BE ILL-ADVISED IN TERMS OF THEIR OWN LONG-TERM INTERESTS--NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE SENILE AND UNABLE TO COORDINATE POLICY, BUT BECAUSE OF THEIR DISTINCTIVE MINDSET, WHICH COLORS THEIR PERCEPTIONS
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AND AFFECTS THEIR FORMULATION OF POLICY. AS ONE RESULT, THEY OFTEN CANNOT ACCURATELY COMPREHEND THE IMPACT OF THEIR ACTIONS ON FOREIGN OPINION--WHETHER U.S., CHINESE, JAPANESE, EUROPEAN OR AFRICAN.

5. RELATIVELY ENLIGHTENED CHARACTERS LIKE DOBRYNIN AND ARBATOV NOTWITHSTANDING, THE BASIC MINDSET OF SOVIET POLICY MAKERS IS UNLIKELY TO CHANGE MUCH IN THE NEAR TERM. SO WHILE WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO PERSUADE THEM TO DESIST FROM DESTABILIZING BEHAVIOR, WE MUST ALSO CONTINUE TO MAKE THE COST OF SUCH BEHAVIOR--AS THEY PERCEIVE THE COST--AS HIGH AS WE REASONABLY CAN. TOON

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